

VZCZCXRO2855  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHCV #0725/01 1021459  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 121459Z APR 07  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8341  
INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0822  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000725

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/12/2017  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA: POLITICAL PRISONER CONDITIONS WORSEN

REF: A. CARACAS 00147 AND PREVIOUS  
[1](#)B. 06 CARACAS 02424 AND PREVIOUS

CARACAS 00000725 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

-----  
Summary  
-----

[1](#)1. (C) There are indications that the BRV is stepping up its efforts to demean, discourage, and disillusion its political prisoners. Former police commissioners Ivan Simonovis, Lazaro Forero, and Henry Vivas launched a hunger strike April 10 to protest the deplorable conditions in the prison to which they have been recently transferred, as well as to their continued illegal detention. The ex-commissioners, along with eight other Caracas Metropolitan Police officers, are on trial as accomplices to murder for events related to the April 2002 coup, and were listed as political prisoners in the Department's 2006 Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Venezuela (Ref A). At the same time, former Finance Minister and retired Brigadier General Francisco Uson Ramirez, a political prisoner listed in the Country Report since 2005 (Ref B), was recently denied visitors for allegedly violating prison rules on the sending and receiving of correspondence following the widespread publication of his letter in support of Radio Caracas Television (RCTV). End Summary.

-----  
Simonovis, Vivas, Forero  
-----

[1](#)2. (U) Former police commissioners Ivan Simonovis, Lazaro Forero, and Henry Vivas, who are on trial along with eight other Caracas Metropolitan Police officers as accomplices to murder for events related to the April 2002 coup, launched a hunger strike April 10 to protest inhumane prison conditions, as well as their continued illegal detention. (Note: In November 2006, the police officials reached the two-year detention mark, at which point Venezuelan law requires them to be released for the remainder of the trial.) The ex-commissioners, incarcerated since 2004, had been held in DISIP headquarters in Caracas, but were arbitrarily moved the week of April 1 to a DISIP installation closer to the court house in Maracay where they are standing trial. The other eight officers were returned to their cells in Caracas.

[1](#)3. (U) Forero's wife described the ex-commissioners'

quarters to reporters as a bug-infested, "makeshift cell that seems more like an animal cage." She said it is dark, with unbearable heat, and "without any type of privacy, not even to relieve their physiological needs." When the defense protested the conditions, the judge ordered that the defendants be returned to the Caracas jail. However, police authorities ignored the judge's order on April 10 and returned the ex-Commissioners to the objectionable cell.

¶4. (SBU) Simonovis' wife (and lawyer) told Poloff April 11 that Caracas authorities claimed that they kept the ex-commissioners in Maracay the first time because one of the cars they used to transport them had broken down. Mrs. Simonovis said, however, that the Maracay police offered one of their cars as a temporary replacement. She said the judge has promised to intervene, but she has "no faith whatsoever" in that promise. She also told Poloff that she and the other defense lawyers have alerted the Inter-American Human Rights Commission about the situation as well. A pro-Chavez human rights leader called on the Supreme Tribunal of Justice to "take corrective measures to end the hunger strike." Attorney General Rodriguez has asked DISIP and TSJ officials to shore up security around the commissioners, alleging that they were being held under the same lax conditions that allowed former CTV labor union president Carlos Ortega and ex-governor Eduardo Lapi to escape.

-----  
General Uson  
-----

¶5. (U) On April 5 retired Brigadier General (and former Finance Minister) Francisco Uson's right to receive visitors was suspended for a week for allegedly violating prison regulations regarding the sending and receiving of correspondence. (Note: Uson is serving a five and one-half year term at Ramo Verde military prison for alleged

CARACAS 00000725 002.2 OF 002

"defamation" of the military (Ref B).) The decision appears to be in retaliation for Uson's open letter in support of Radio Caracas Television (RCTV), which was widely published in local newspapers. Uson's lawyer, Gonzalo Himiob, tried to appeal the decision to the Human Rights Ombudsman, arguing that his client was denied his constitutional right to due process. The Ombudsman's office made Himiob wait two and one-half hours before refusing to accept the request. Similarly, an attempt to request a copy of the regulation in question also went unanswered.

-----  
Comment  
-----

¶6. (C) The BRV's latest treatment of the political prisoners is yet another way to demean, discourage, and disillusion them, as well as to intimidate other potential and existing opposition members. Vivas, Forero, and Simonovis' treatment appears to have steadily deteriorated in the past few months. Threats against Simonovis' wife and lawyer has increased to the point where she now has a police guard. Uson had received death threats last year in prison. The ex-Commissioners' lawyers seem to believe the trial will end this year, but it is unlikely the politicized, Chavez-controlled court system will acquit the so-called "enemies of the revolution," despite the fact the prosecution has yet to produce evidence linking them to any wrongdoing. Post will continue to maintain contact with the families and defense teams.

BROWNFIELD